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OPINION: Why do Private Security Companies Let “Bottom Feeders” Set the Standards?

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Not too long ago, a LinkedIn member asked for help through a discussion group in approaching potential clients. Her biggest obstacle was trying to sell her company's security services at a rate higher than her competitors, which she considered to be sub-standard rates, but which also seemed to be the average in her area.

I see the same kind of thing happening with security officer services in the metropolitan NY-NJ area (where an hourly wage of \$8 - \$9 will get you warm, walking and breathing, but where \$10 - \$13 per hour will get you an officer with a brain) and also with security officer training in NJ, where instructors offer the 24 hour certification course for \$145 to \$99 – or even less. I can't help but wonder not *IF* these providers are cutting corners but *which* corners they're cutting. And I also wonder: *When did sub-standard start setting the bar so that we sink to the lowest level, instead of being the best we can be so that others want to rise to our standard of excellence?*

Part of the fault lies with the end user who focuses on the bottom line: “I can pay for a \$12 security officer or for an \$8 guard. Hmmm... the insurance company (or the bean counters) don't care about the quality of the officer we have, just as long as we have a body. I can pay a little more to a company which offers its' employees a living wage (and such benefits as paid holidays and sick days) and get a higher quality service provider. Or I can pay less so that my contract employees don't get annual raises, or the contract employees who don't work on holidays don't get paid, or come in to work when they're sick. I *could* pay a little more... Nah; I may have to offer this benefit to my employees, but not to my contractors.”

Some of us will say (or have said) to those potential clients, “Well, I wish you luck; call us when you're tired of your bargain basement service,” and walk away, while other face a difficult choice: accept a lowball offer that goes against the grain and keep people employed and my company going, or stick to my guns and watch my competitors get new business while I lose sleep worrying about how to meet my overhead.

Who was it that said, “You can go broke being right?”

There's a parody for guard services at www.cheapguards.com, with the following disclaimer:

- “This is a parody website that points out the absolute absurdity and sheer stupidity of organizations that purchase low-priced security guard services in today's high threat environment.”

Read a little further and you'll see:

- “While we do not have trained, qualified and responsible employees, what we can offer you is cheap service....We will not be beat on price. That means no matter how cheap you are purchasing your guard services for now, we will always be cheaper.”

While this is obviously meant to be amusing, it is, in so many areas, frighteningly true. You can't educate a customer, or a potential customer, who doesn't want to be educated.

How many clients have opted for a low bill rate, only to switch back to their previous service provider after an incident which proves that cheaper is no bargain? How can we help them not to make this mistake – or, like the kid who just has to put his tongue on the frozen metal fence to see if it really will get stuck, is this just one of those things you have to find out for yourself?

“Quality is remembered long after the price is forgotten,” is the slogan of the Gucci family, manufacturers of fine leather goods. When the stuff hits the fan and all goes wrong, who do you want protecting you – an inept but well meaning Barney Fife (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Barney_Fife), or Sheriff Andy?

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